

A Century of Caring  
A CELEBRATION OF  
PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING  
IN THE UNITED STATES  
1893 - 1993





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*A Selection of Photos  
Reflecting Contributions of  
Public Health Nursing  
in the United States*

# Acknowledgments

The idea for this photoessay originated at the Division of Nursing of the Bureau of Health Professions, within the Health Resources and Services Administration of the United States Public Health Service. It was a collaborative effort of many people. Dr. Audrey Davis of the Smithsonian Institution provided the major historical background and most of the photos used. Her knowledge of the history of women in the United States, and especially of early public health nurses, provided the basis for this pictorial history. Dr. Moira Shannon and Captain Janet Horan, staff from the Division of Nursing, designed the final product and coordinated the related activities. Mr. James Walker and Mr. Francis Harding of the Health Resources and Services Administration did the graphic design and layout of the publication. The American Public Health Association generously published the document.

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The cover photo was supplied through the courtesy of Mr. Lyle Churchill, Vice President for Development, Visiting Nurse Service of New York.

**D**ear Colleagues: We are delighted to be a part of this country's recognition of the special role public health nursing has played over its first century of service. One hundred years of meeting the health needs of the people of the United States; what a truly wonderful heritage for all of us!

It is also our pleasure to be a part of the important process of looking forward and helping to shape public health nursing for the 21st century. The challenges of today and tomorrow are both similar and different from those of yesterday. Some plagues have been eliminated even as new ones emerge.

The vision that guided public health nurses then will continue to serve us well: to preserve, protect and enhance the health of the people of this country. We in the U.S. Public Health Service, particularly those of us in the Division of Nursing and the Bureau of Health Professions, are honored to work in partnership with public health nurses everywhere to bring this vision forward into the future.

This photo essay brings together selected photos that reflect the rich and diverse history of public health nursing in the United States over the past 100 years.

Marla E. Salmon, ScD, FAAN  
*Director, Division of Nursing*

Fitzhugh Mullan, MD  
*Director, Bureau of Health Professions*



# Introduction

Public Health nursing in the United States traces its origins to those first graduate nurses who provided nursing services to poor people in their homes across the nation. These nurses provided care to those in need with little or no financial compensation, and they were frequently the only providers of care to these underprivileged people. These first public health nurses were courageous and caring women whose commitment to those they served was challenged daily by the overwhelming health problems they confronted and the social conventions that saw little place for women who operated outside of the haven of class and family. What truly remarkable and compassionate pioneers they were.

The “official” event which marks the beginning of public health nursing in this country was the founding of the first organized public health nursing agency or settlement house in New York City in 1893. This agency went beyond the individual efforts of community nurses of previous times and began a large scale national movement to assure that “public health nurses” would be available to those in need. The vision of this movement came from Ms. Lillian Wald, a nurse, and the founder of the Henry Street Settlement in 1893 - the first district nursing agency in the United States. It was Ms. Wald, with her sense of calling, exceptional political and organizational skills, and tireless leadership, who brought together the people, resources and caring that became the phrase that she herself coined: the “public health nurse”.

While the words of historians can and in some cases have characterized the work of those early public health nurses in Henry Street and elsewhere, it is the images depicted in these photographs that truly chronicled the special work of public health nurses. These photographs also portray the people they serve and the many settings in which they worked. Homes, workplaces, schools, street corners, clinics....anywhere people in need could be found; these were the settings captured on film. Each photo is different - each image unique. One of the major common themes is reaching out to care for the health of people in need.

Another theme of the photographs of public health nurses is one of very independent and creative women forging a profession against great odds. Public health nursing agencies, those first settlement houses and district nursing agencies, were among the earliest major enterprises run by women in this country. Early public health nurses were competent administrators and managers who were able to mobilize community resources to support largely “unprofitable” businesses. How fortunate for this country that these business women saw human health as the greatest profit of all! For nursing and for women in general, the public health nurses who forged these important social organizations were truly inspirational models who still have much to teach us.

An additional theme, especially in the photographs assembled for this essay, is the theme of one person making a difference. The history of public health nursing is one of individuals doing what was within their power to do - to make life better for others. The photographs here are generally not of the “great leaders”, they are of those whose names are no longer connected to their images. In this way, they are each of us - or what each of us could be. They are timeless inspirations for public health nurses of today and tomorrow to do what they are able to do and leave their world a better place.

This photo essay has been assembled, in part, to capture some of the unique history of public health nursing. It is also intended to share the spirit of public health nurses everywhere - a spirit of caring and personal courage. It is this spirit that made the first century of public health nursing a reality in the United States. It is our hope that this photo essay will help to kindle the spirit of those who carry this special legacy forward into the next century.

Audrey Davis  
Moir Shannon  
Janet Horan

# Public Health Nurses

*Public health nurses have worn many uniforms over the last century and their photographs were used for publicity and to encourage staff morale.*



*VNA of Chicago, Illinois. ca 1905*



*VNA of Arlington, Virginia. ca 1960*

*VNA of Michiana,  
South Bend, Michigan. ca 1930*



*VNA of Denver, Colorado. ca 1928*



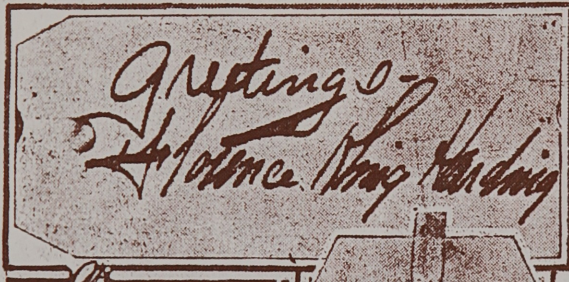
*VNA of Rochester, New York. ca 1920*



*VNA of Rochester, New York. ca 1940*

Public health nurses were resourceful in raising needed funds and political support, and in filling social as well as professional roles.

## Card Signed by 'First Lady' To Be Sold Nurses' Tag Day



## Visiting Nurses to Sell Autographs Of Noted Persons

Cards Bearing Such Signatures as Mrs. Warren Harding, Woodrow Wilson, Herbert Hoover, Etc., on Sale Tag Day.

### VISITING NURSE ASSOCIATION



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Poster used during Drive

# Send the Nurse to the Sick at Home

Contribute to the \$50,000 fund for  
The INSTRUCTIVE VISITING  
NURSE SOCIETY

Only 10% of the sick  
go to Hospitals  
Help send the Nurse  
to the other 90%

headquarters 1413 G St. N.W. R. S. Huidekoper, Treasurer.

Above left: The autographs of famous persons such as Florence King Harding, wife of the president, were sold or auctioned to encourage larger donations on Tag Days.

VNA of Omaha, Nebraska. ca 1919

Above right: Public health nursing extra efforts, such as during a flu epidemic, were publicized to urge larger donations.

VNA of Omaha, Nebraska. ca 1919

Left: Patients were encouraged to raise funds.

VNA of Washington, D.C. ca 1920

*VNA of Cleveland, Ohio. ca 1919*



*Easter remembrances for patients.  
VNA of Brooklyn, New York. ca 1950*



*Guests such as Mrs. Calvin Coolidge,  
wife of the president, helped to celebrate  
public health nursing special events.  
VNA of Washington, D.C. ca 1925*

Public health nurses have travelled by many modes of transportation over the years.

*Below: Snowshoes enabled visits to rural families.*

*IVNA of Richmond, Virginia. ca 1920*



*Above left: The first automobiles owned by nursing agencies were usually donated.*

*VNA of Washington, D.C. ca 1920*

*Above right: When uniforms became shorter, bicycles were used.*

*VNA of Brooklyn, New York. ca 1950*

*Left: Mary Breckinridge, founder of the Frontier Nursing Service, on horseback.*

*The Frontier Nursing Service, Wendover, Kentucky. ca 1930  
(photo by Marvin Patterson)*

# The People Served by Public Health Nurses

The U.S. Public Health Service, as the Federal agency responsible for the health of the nation, has employed public health nurses to provide services to many populations in the United States. Vaccines to prevent disease as well as services to promote health and care for illnesses have been provided through the Public Health Service.



*Top left: Public health nurse shows an Indian family the results of their tuberculosis x-rays.*

*National Archives. ca 1955*

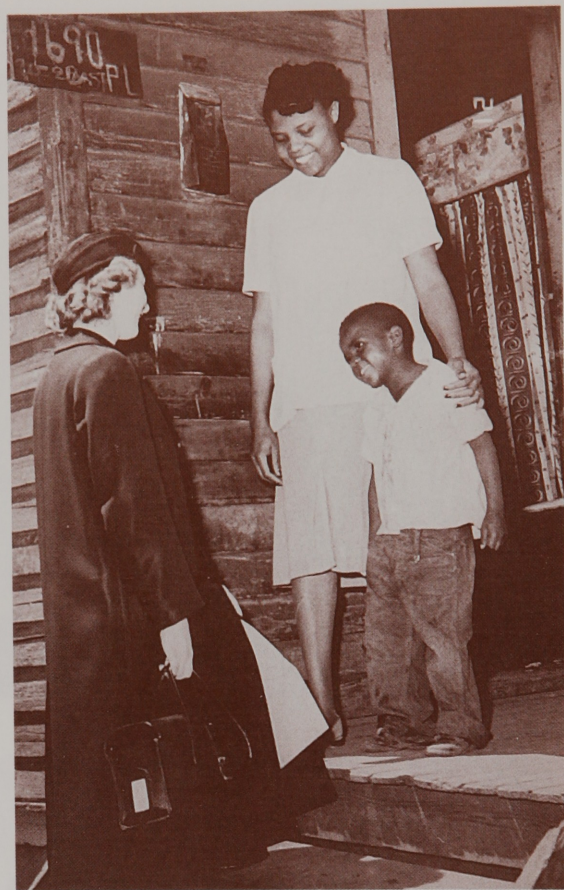
*Top right: Public health nurse screening new immigrants at Ellis Island in New York.*

*National Library of Medicine. ca 1890-1920*

*Left: Public health service nurse weighing and measuring school children in a rural setting as part of a Children's Bureau program.*

*National Archives. ca 1920*

Public health nurses have served people across the life span and have practiced in a variety of settings. They have addressed a continuum of health needs including health promotion and disease prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation.



*Above Left: Public health nurse visits 3 generations of a Native American family.*

*Indian Health Service. ca 1960*

*Above right: Mother and child welcome the public health nurse.*

*Cleveland, Ohio. ca 1950*

*Left: Public health nurse talks with elderly person.*

*National Library of Medicine. ca 1930*

*Public health nurse teaching foot care.*

*VNA of Boston, Massachusetts. ca 1920*



*Public health nurse giving demonstration in bathing of an infant.*

*VNA of Newark, New Jersey. ca 1912*

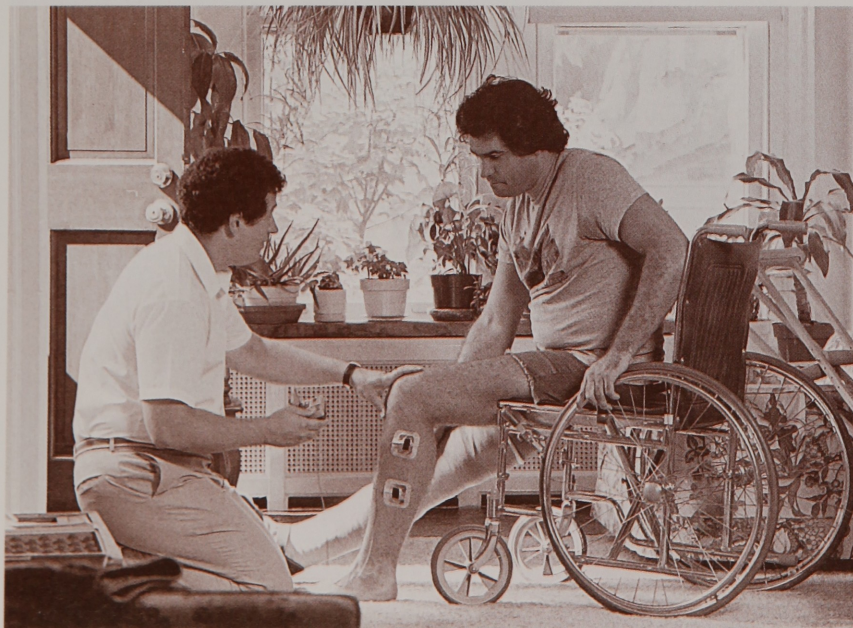


*Public health nurse teaching urine testing to diabetic woman.*

*VNA of Rockford, Illinois. ca 1950*

*Public health nurse teaching rehabilitation techniques.*

*VNA of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. ca 1980*



*Helping people to regain function after illness or injury.*



*VNA of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. ca 1980*



*VNA of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. ca 1980*



*Minnesota Historical Society. ca 1930*



*Minnesota Historical Society. ca 1920*

# Places

*San Felipe Pueblo with outdoor  
adobe ovens in foreground.*

*U.S. Indian Service, Albuquerque, New Mexico.*



*Yard showing proximity of well  
water supply and toilet facilities.*

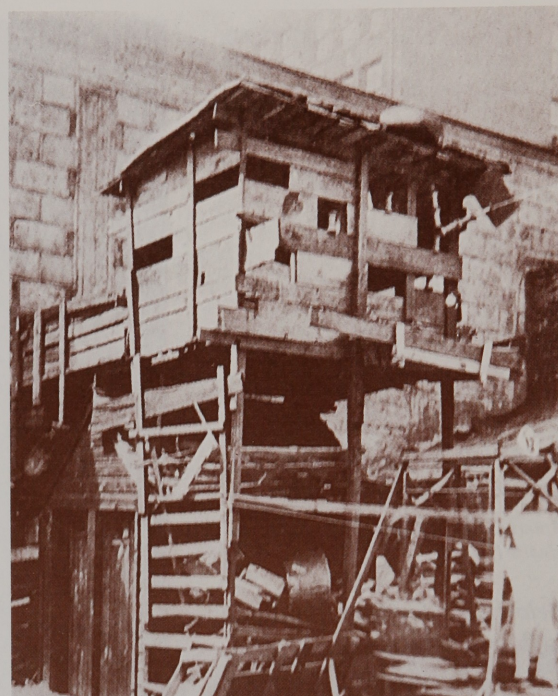
*VNA of Michiana, South Bend, Michigan.*

*Public health nurse cares for  
a child in a tent after an earthquake.*

*VNA of Santa Barbara, California. ca 1925*



*Home in rural area.*  
*VNA of Michiana, South Bend, Michigan.*



*The place up high .*  
*VNA of Cleveland, Ohio. ca 1930*



*Outdoor home.*  
*VNA of Santa Barbara, California.*

# Workplaces

*Goldminer receives foot care.*

*VNA of Denver, Colorado. ca 1910*

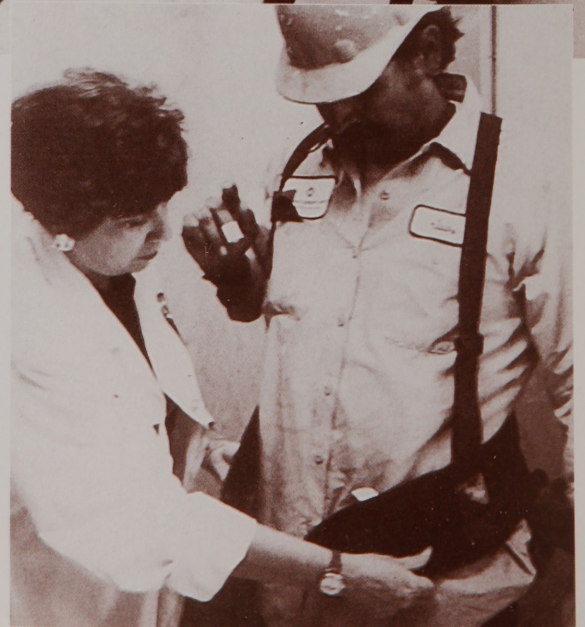


*Below left: Employees receiving care in occupational health clinic.*

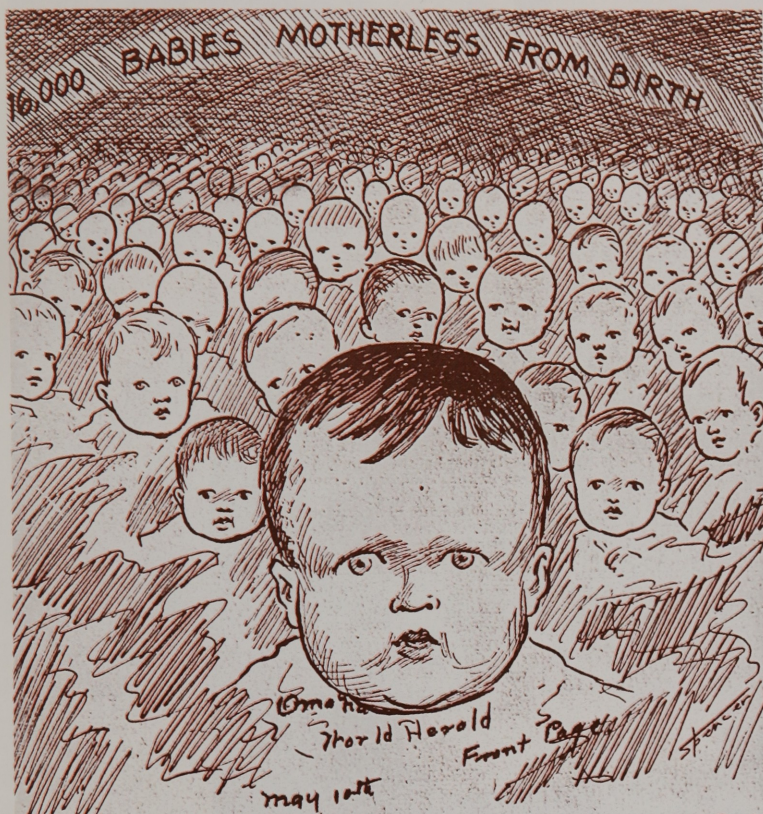
*American Association of Occupational Health Nurses.*

*Below right: Implementing safety in the workplace.*

*American Association of Occupational Health Nurses.*



## People



*Maternal death has long been a problem in the United States.*

*VNA of Omaha, Nebraska.  
May 10, 1920*

THE UNITED STATES HAS  
THE HIGHEST AMONG 2  
6.5 MOTHERS FOR EVERY

*Public health nurses taught mothers  
how to keep their babies healthy.*

*VNA of Portland, Oregon, ca 1920*

### SAVE THE BABIES

It is not the babies born,  
but the babies saved that count.

Mothers, nurse your babies!  
The greatest good you can do  
your baby is to nurse it during  
the first year.

When nursing is impossible  
cows milk is the only good sub-  
stitute for mother's milk.

Do not use any milk that  
you do not KNOW to be clean  
and pure. If you cannot get pure  
milk we will help you.

Another object of our milk  
station is to furnish milk modi-  
fied under the direction of a phy-  
sician to such babies as cannot  
take raw milk.

Our first milk station will  
be opened at 270 Fourth Street,  
opposite the City Hall on or  
about June 15th.

There will be a clinic daily  
from 11:00 to 12:00, with a  
physician in attendance.

A graduate nurse will be in  
charge of the station to modify  
the milk and to advise the  
mothers in the care of their  
babies.

Classes will be held and  
mothers will be taught how to  
bathe and care for their babies.

*Healthy twins depict benefits  
of good diet and good care.*

*VNA of Omaha, Nebraska. ca 1930*



**V. N. A. Now Testing Eyesight of  
Children and Foresight of Adults**

*Wellbaby clinic.*

*VNA of Rockford, Illinois. ca 1949*

*School health clinic.*

*VNA of Somerset Hills, New Jersey. ca 1940*



*Teaching parents about health at Swann's Creek School, Gray's Creek Township, Cumberland County, North Carolina.*

*National Museum of American History. ca 1950*



*Teaching children proper nutrition.*

*VNA of Greater Manchester, New Hampshire. ca 1930*



*Teaching mother and children how to prepare food.*

*VNA of Omaha, Nebraska. ca 1910*

*Observing growth and development.*

*VNA of Brooklyn, New York. ca 1950*

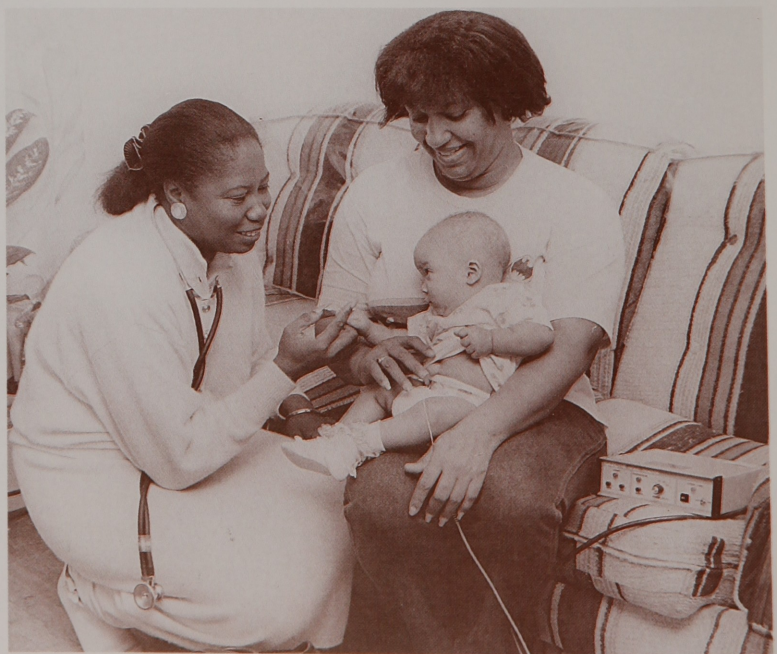


*Mother, brother, nurse and baby share a smile.*

*VNA of Brooklyn, New York. ca 1950*

*Monitoring infant health.*

*VNA of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. ca 1970*



*Communicable disease: a major threat to the health of the public and a challenge to public health nurses.*



*Public health nurse giving medicine to tubercular patient.  
VNA of Omaha, Nebraska. ca 1920*



*Public health nurse cares for children with measles in room that serves as kitchen, bedroom and dining room.  
VNA of Newark, New Jersey. ca 1916*



*Public health nurse provides  
immunization against  
communicable disease.  
Indian Health Service.*



*Public health nurse adjusts leg brace  
for child with infantile paralysis to  
minimize effects of paralysis.  
Minnesota Historical Society. ca 1930*



